The Corporation of The City of London

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Big City Mayors To Ottawa: We Can Help Keep The Engine Running

(OTTAWA, Ontario) - Canada's cities have an important role to play in helping the Government of Canada meet its key priorities - strengthening national competitiveness and promoting prosperity - but they need support in the next Federal budget. That was the message today as the Mayors of Canada's largest cities gathered in Ottawa to call on the Federal government to remember Canada's cities in the upcoming Federal budget.

"Our cities are engines of the national economy and, with support in the next Federal budget, we can continue helping to drive Canada's long-term competitiveness and productivity," said Mayor Pat Fiacco of Regina, Chair of FCM's Big City Mayors' Caucus (BCMC). "But, we can't do this without help. We need the Federal government to continue its investment in municipal infrastructure to keep our cities competitive and help us meet Canadians' expectations."

The Mayors said today's intense global competition requires Canada's cities to have all the tools they need to be successful, starting with resources to eliminate the municipal infrastructure deficit. They said they are pleased by the Federal government's stated commitment to extend the Federal gas-tax transfer. They called on the government to act on last fall's House of Commons resolution to make the current gas-tax transfer permanent, with an escalator to offset the effects of inflation and population growth.

The Mayors are supporting the Federal government's commitment to transportation, and reiterated their call for long-term Federal investment in transit that will deliver $2 billion a year to maintain and expand the system to accommodate growing ridership. "Safe, reliable and efficient public transit is essential to our cities," said Mayor Gerald Tremblay of Montreal. "It creates significant benefits, such as improving our international competitiveness, quality of life and environmental sustainability. A long-term commitment will give us the tools to improve our productivity."

The Mayors also flagged affordable housing as a critical need that must be addressed in the next budget. They called on the Federal government to adopt FCM's National Action Plan on Housing, released last month in Vancouver. "The scheduled expiry of all Federal social housing funding programs in March 2009 means the government must signify in this year's budget its intention to take action to end Canada's affordable housing crisis," said Mayor Anne Marie DeCicco-Best of London, ON.

Finally, the Mayors addressed the urgent need to modernize the fiscal system, which doesn't allow cities to develop fully and contribute to Canada's economic growth. Cities must be able to count on revenue that grows with the economy, for example through the transfer of the equivalent of one cent of the goods and services tax to cities and communities. "The equivalent of one cent of the GST would generate some $5 billion a year to renew our infrastructure," said Mayor Larry O'Brien of Ottawa."

The Mayors concluded by praising the government for its recent decision to help communities hit by economic upheaval and offered to continue working in partnership with the government to build a Canada with safe, sustainable cities where everyone has a decent place to live.

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